

## **NON-FORMAL EDUCATION IN ROMANIA – AN ANALYSIS IN EUROPEAN CONTEXT**

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### **Abstract**

*Non-formal education is an important component in adults' education. The current study aims to analyse the status quo of non-formal education in Europe, based on most recently available data. The research will focus on Romania. Furthermore, the paper contains an analysis of the higher education area in this country and recommendations for using non-formal education in order to bring value-added to this sector.*

**Keywords:** *non-formal education; long life learning; adults' education; higher education*

### **1. Introduction**

Chisholm (2005) outlines that non-formal education comprises voluntary acts of structured learning that take place outside formal education. Emphasizing the importance of such an education, Kiilakoski (2015) points out that non-formal education is an essential part of adults' professional development, helping them to develop soft skills that are not sufficiently covered by formal education.

Moreover, Patrick (2010) recommends that non-formal education should be recognised as part of formal studies. European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (2009) clearly states that even if *"validating non-formal and informal learning poses challenges to formal education in terms of the range of learning that can be validated and how this process can be integrated into the formal curriculum and its assessment"* (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, 2009 p.71), *"validation of non-formal and informal learning should be seen as an integral part of the national qualifications system"* (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, 2009 p.70). Furthermore, in 2013 the European Parliament adopted *Resolution 1930 and Recommendation 2014 (2013): Young Europeans: an urgent educational challenge*, asking member states to take all necessary steps to ensure recognition and fair access to non-formal education.

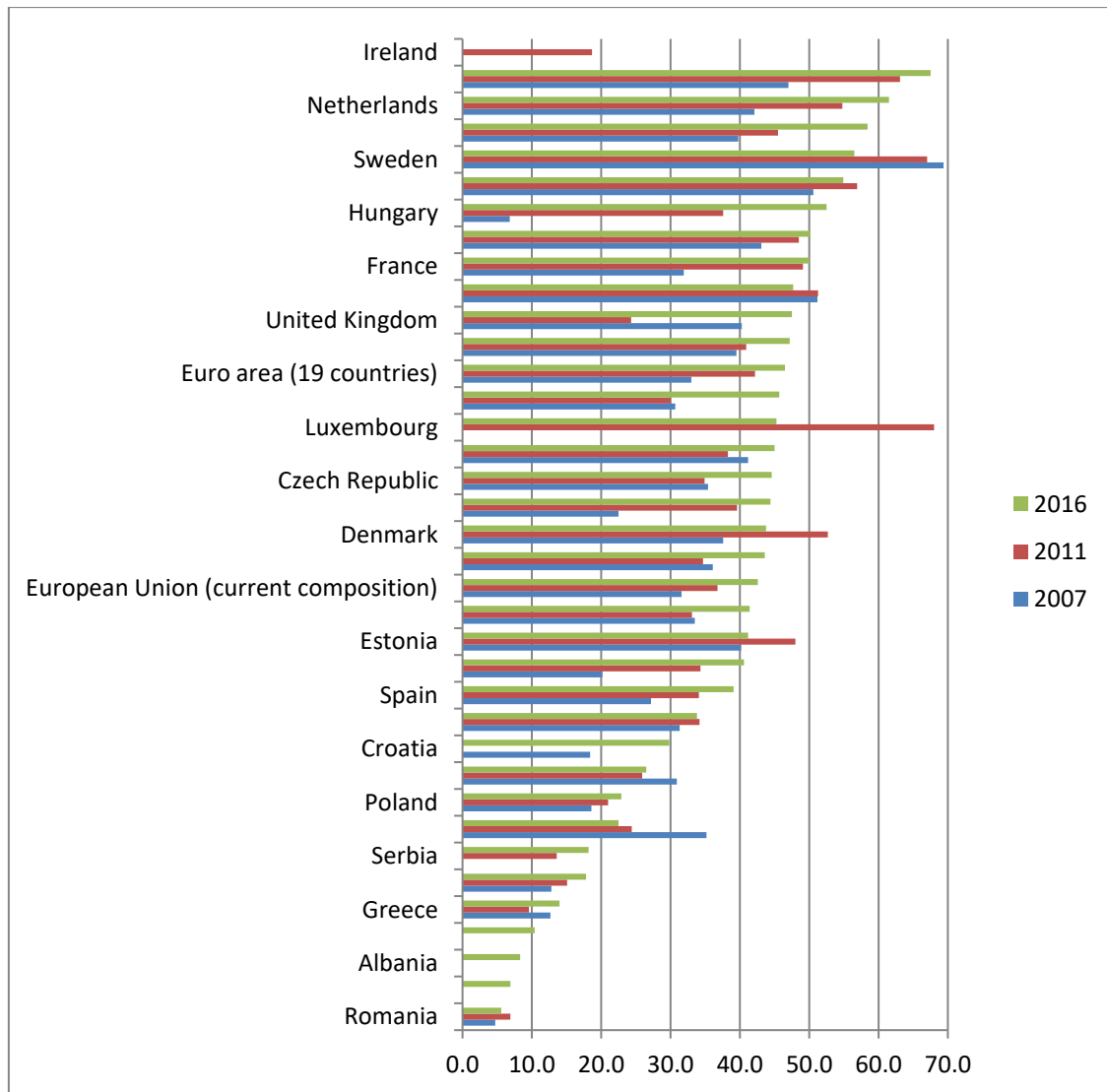
Despite the importance of non-formal education and the progress made towards recognition, there are many challenges that European countries have to overcome (European Commission, 2015). Out of these, universities' reluctance to recognize non-formal education is urgent (Darnesin et al. 2014).

The current study aims to perform an analysis of the status quo of non-formal education in Europe, based on most recently available data. The research will focus on Romania, as this country made important steps for enhancing adult education (Balica, 2016). The paper is structured as follows: the first part focuses on non-formal education in Europe, in or-

der to determine Romania's position with regard to specific indicators in this area; the second part is dedicated to various aspects of non-formal education in Romania; the last section contains an analysis of the higher education area in this country and recommendations for using non-formal education in order to bring value-added to this sector.

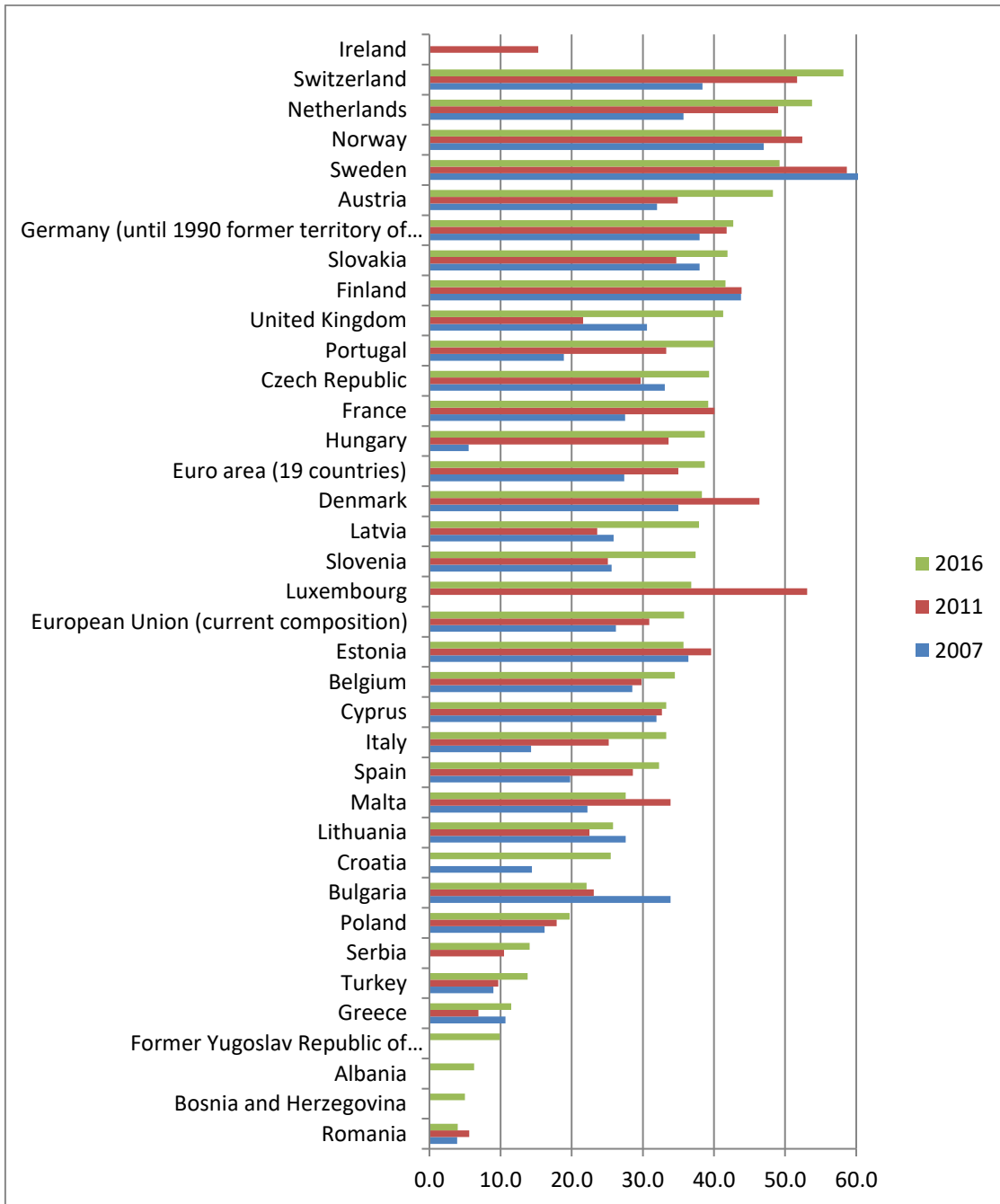
## 2. Non-formal education in Europe

Figure 1 shows the participation rate in non-formal education and training while figure 2 presents the participation rate in job-related non-formal education and training in 2007, 2011 and 2016 for several European countries, as well as for the European Union in its current composition and the Euro Area. As one can observe, Romania registers the lowest values among all countries, for both indicators, in 2016. Moreover, both indicators decreased in 2016 compared to 2011 for this country. The situation is similar for Bulgaria, Malta, Estonia, Denmark, Luxemburg, Finland, Norway and Sweden. Furthermore, for Romania both indicators have lower values compared to 2007.



**Figure 1.** Participation rate in non-formal education and training

Source of data: Eurostat



**Figure 2.** Participation rate in job-related non-formal education and training

Source of data: Eurostat

Next, the analysis explores participation rates in non-formal education and training taking into account several issues identified by literature: relationship with formal education (Livingstone, 2011), gender equality (Gee, 2015), widening participation in lifelong learning for older people (Villar and Celdran, 2013). The ANOVA procedure was used in order to assess whether or not there is a significant difference in the participation rates in non-formal education by gender, age group, as well as between the participation rate in non-formal education and the participation rate in formal and non-formal education. The analysis was

performed for 2007, 2011 and 2016, taking into account all European countries, for which data are available

Table 1 presents the results for the participation rate in non-formal education and training. As one can observe, there is no significant difference between this indicator and the participation rate in formal and non-formal education at European level. Also, no significant difference between genders can be observed for the participation rate in non-formal education and training. With regard to age groups, the only significant difference occurs when comparing each age group to 55 to 64 years. 47.4% of those aged 25 to 34 in the European Union participated in non-formal education in 2016. The indicator registers 46.7% for those aged 35 to 44, 43.9% for those aged 45 to 54 and only 32.3% for those aged 55 to 64.

**Table 1.** ANOVA single factor analysis results - P-value Participation rate in education and training

	<b>2007</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2016</b>
Formal and non-formal education and training compared to non-formal education and training	0.381645	0.423011	0.502257
Non-formal education and training - Males compared to Females	0.966904	0.905579	0.981933
Non-formal education and training - 25 to 34 years compared to 35 to 44 years	0.788014	0.950071	0.848709
Non-formal education and training - 25 to 34 years compared to 45 to 54 years	0.166973	0.376814	0.190683
Non-formal education and training - 25 to 34 years compared to 55 to 64 years	2.91E-06	2.84E-05	2.77E-05
Non-formal education and training - 35 to 44 years compared to 45 to 54 years	0.279102	0.4114	0.278691
Non-formal education and training - 35 to 44 years compared to 55 to 64 years	1.71E-05	3.73E-05	0.000104
Non-formal education and training - 45 to 54 years compared to 55 to 64 years	0.00095	0.000961	0.004271

Source: author's design

Table 2 presents the results for the participation rate in job-related non-formal education and training, while table 3 presents the results only for those activities sponsored by the employer. The only significant difference can be observed only when comparing each age group to the 55 to 64. Indeed, in 2016, 39.5% of those aged 25 to 34 participated in job-related non-formal education. The indicator registers 40.6% for those aged 35 to 44, 38.2 for those aged 45 to 54 and only 24.3% for those aged 54 to 64. Also, 34.2% of those aged 25 to 34 participated in job-related non-formal education sponsored by the employer, in 2016. This indicator registered 36.2% for those aged 35 to 44, 34.8% for those aged 45 to 54 and only 21.8% for those aged 54 to 64.

**Table 2.** ANOVA single factor analysis results - P-value Participation rate in job-related non-formal education and training

	<b>2007</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2016</b>
Non-formal education and training - Males compared to Females	0.393905	0.476341	0.568652
Non-formal education and training - 25 to 34 years compared to 35 to 44 years	0.985087	0.815188	0.767008
Non-formal education and training - 25 to 34 years compared to 45 to 54 years	0.347412	0.413213	0.413213
Non-formal education and training - 25 to 34 years compared to 55 to 64 years	7.49E-07	1.97E-06	1.06E-05
Non-formal education and training - 35 to 44 years compared to 45 to 54 years	0.356761	0.426542	0.275551
Non-formal education and training - 35 to 44 years compared to 55 to 64 years	1.99E-06	7.33E-07	4.88E-06
Non-formal education and training - 45 to 54 years compared to 55 to 64 years	0.000105	2.41E-05	0.000358

Source: author's design

**Table 3.** ANOVA single factor analysis results - P-value Participation rate in job-related and sponsored by the employer non-formal education and training

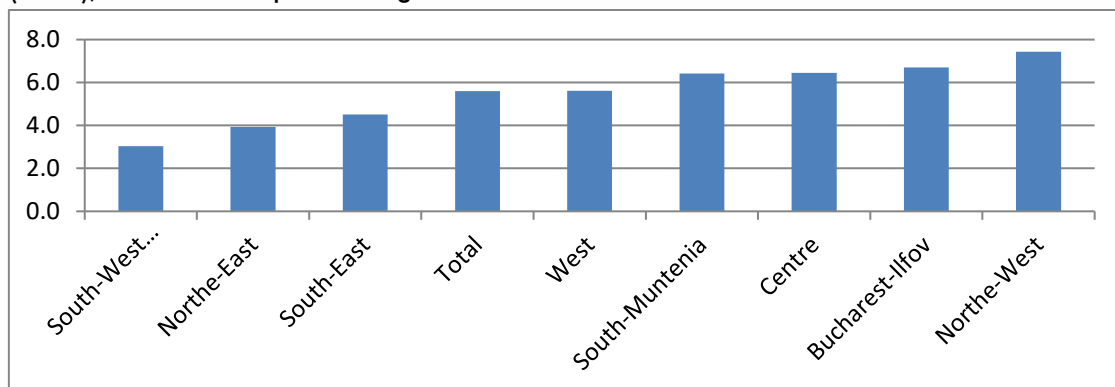
	2007	2011	2016
Non-formal education and training - Males compared to Females	0.283305	0.354112	0.429301
Non-formal education and training - 25 to 34 years compared to 35 to 44 years	0.795727	0.663182	0.544214
Non-formal education and training - 25 to 34 years compared to 45 to 54 years	0.569953	0.835279	0.793224
Non-formal education and training - 25 to 34 years compared to 55 to 64 years	1.11E-05	3.24E-05	0.000117
Non-formal education and training - 35 to 44 years compared to 45 to 54 years	0.428862	0.522817	0.391607
Non-formal education and training - 35 to 44 years compared to 55 to 64 years	1.04E-05	5.99E-06	1.35E-05
Non-formal education and training - 45 to 54 years compared to 55 to 64 years	0.000239	8.52E-05	0.000379

Source: author's design

### 3. Non-formal education in Romania

Participation in non-formal education in Romania is analysed based on the data provided by the National Institute of Statistics in the publication "Adults education in 2016". Based on the existing scientific literature, several specific topics were chosen for the analysis. First, as Uisalli (2017) points out, non-formal education can address various women educational needs. Second, one should note that Nayar (1979) and Combs and Ahmed (1974) concluded that non-formal education is crucial for socio-economic development of rural areas and poor regions. Third, according to Ololube and Egbezor (2012), non-formal education is a powerful tool to ensure access to basic education for adults. 5.4% of men and 5.7% of women aged 25 to 64 participated in non-formal education, resulting in an overall participation rate of 5.6%. Noticeable differences can be observed when taking into account area of residency: the participation rate for those living in urban areas was 7.2% while for those living in rural areas only 3.3%. This indicator registered 0.8% for persons aged 25 to 64 with lower than secondary education, 4.8% for those with secondary education and 13.6% for those with higher education.

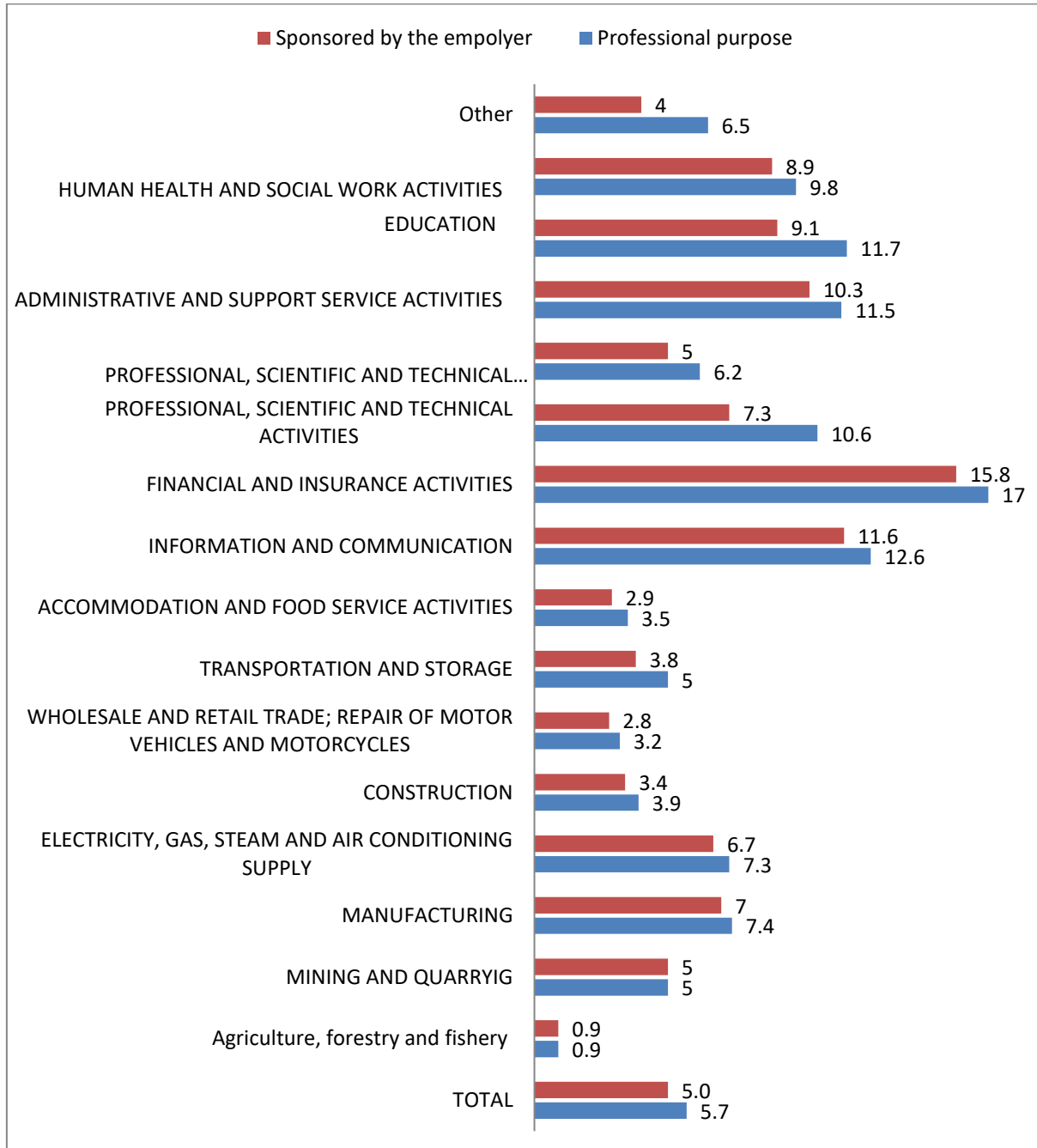
Figure 3 displays participation rates at regional level. As one can observe, the lowest participation rate in non-formal education is registered for South-West Oltenia Region (3%) followed by North-East (approximately 4%). According to Poverty Mapping in Romania Making Better Policies through Better-Targeted Interventions designed by the World Bank (2014), these are the poorest regions in Romania.



**Figure 3.** Persons aged 25-64 years participating in non-formal education, by region

Source of data: National Institute of Statistics of Romania

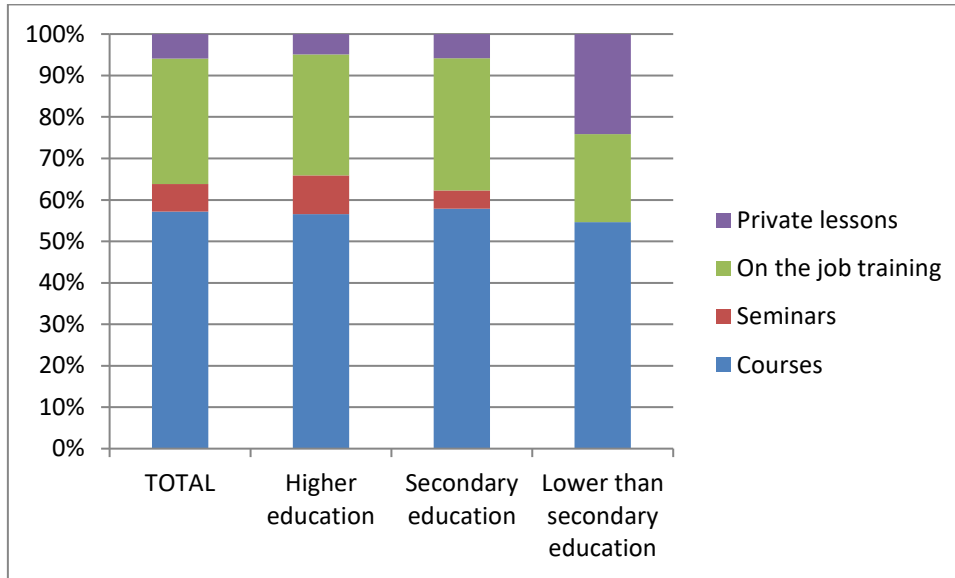
Participation rates in non-formal education for professional purposes as well as sponsored by the employer for employed persons by domain are displayed in figure 4. The lowest participation rate is registered for Agriculture, forestry and fishing (0.9%) for both indicators. One should note that, according to the latest press release of the National Institute of Statistics with regard to employment and unemployment, 22.8% of the employed persons and 19.8% of the skilled employed persons worked in this area (National Institute of Statistics, 2018).



**Figure 4.** Employed persons participating in non-formal education by field (as percentage of employed persons in that field)

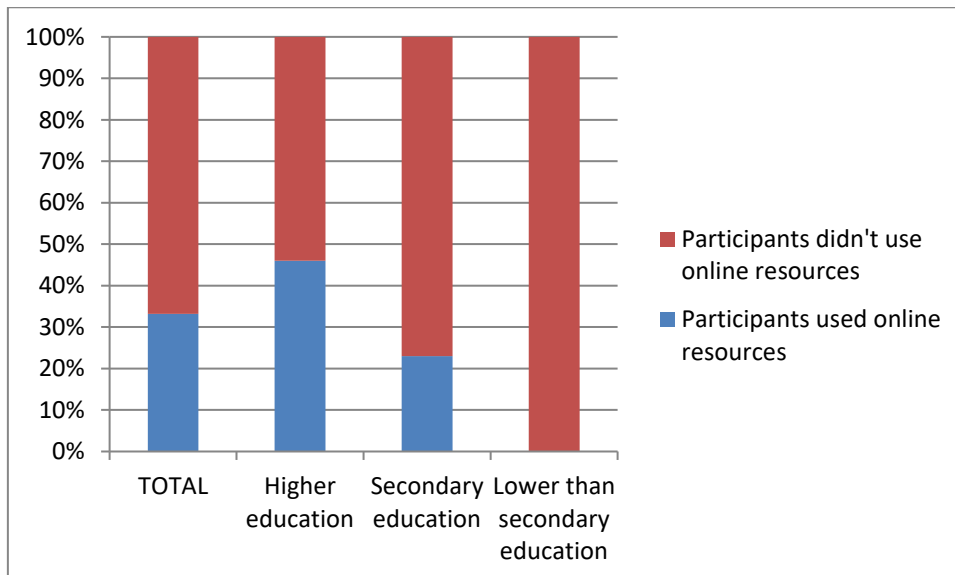
**Source of data:** National Institute of Statistics of Romania

Figures 5 and 6 display participation rates in non-formal education by highest educational attainment and type of activity and highest educational attainment and Internet usage respectively. Kapadia (2014) points out that training on the job is extremely important for organisations and employees. Approximately 30% of the non-formal activities consisted of training on the job. The lowest value for this indicator is registered for persons graduating lower than secondary education. Also, one should note that only one third of the participants in non-formal education used online resources.



**Figure 5.** Participation in non-formal education by type of activity and highest educational attainment of the participant

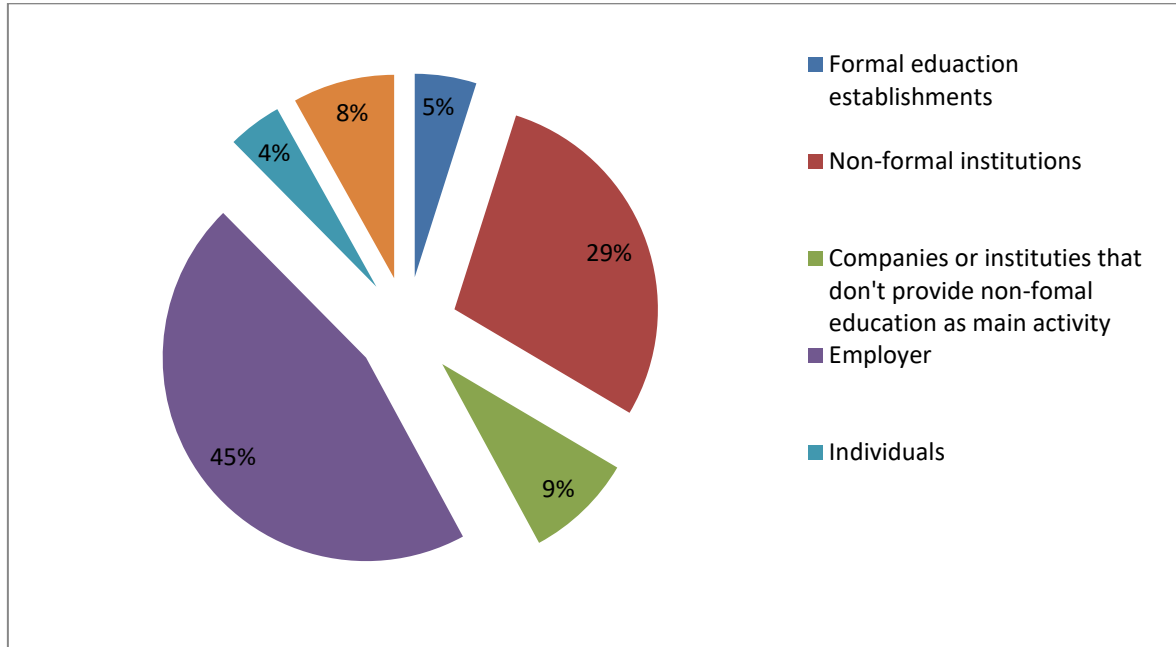
Source of data: National Institute of Statistics of Romania



**Figure 6.** Participation in non-formal education highest educational attainment of the participant and online resources usage

Source of data: National Institute of Statistics of Romania

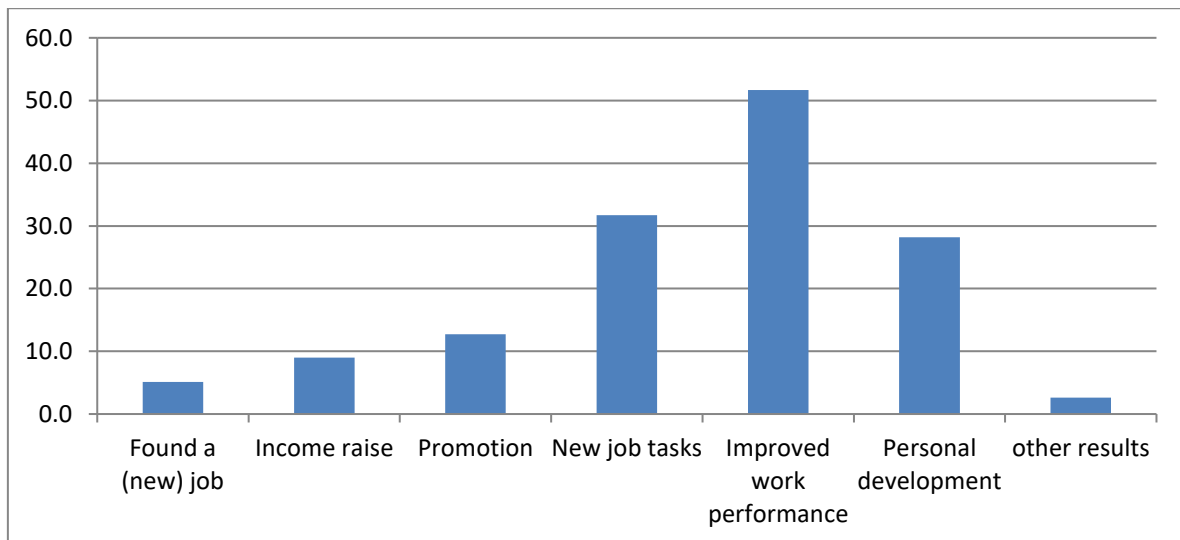
Figure 7 shows participation rates in non-formal education in the last 12 months by provider. Only 5% of non-formal activities were provided by formal education establishments. Most of the activities were provided by the employers.



**Figure 7.** Participation rates in non-formal education in the last 12 months by provider

Source of data: National Institute of Statistics Romania

The outcomes obtained as a result of participation in non-formal education are displayed in figure 8. Most of those who participated in non-formal educational activities claimed that their work performance has been improved. Also, over 30% of the participants mentioned that they received new tasks. Only 9% of the participants obtained an income raise.



**Figure 8.** Outcomes obtained as a result of participation in non-formal education

Source of data: National Institute of Statistics Romania



#### 4. Higher education in Romania – challenges and solutions from the non-formal education area

The higher education area in Romania has been facing many challenges since 1989. First, two important systematic transformations took place in the context of reformation of the entire Romanian society: private universities appeared and the number of students increased dramatically and unsustainable (Andrei *et al.*, 2010a; Andrei *et al.*, 2010b; Andrei *et al.*, 2009a). This kind of transformations occurred also in Hungary and Bulgaria (Andrei *et al.*, 2010c). One should note that the reformation process hasn't been a smooth one, as the transition period has been characterized by corruption and lack of transparency (see for example Andrei *et al.*, 2009b; Andrei *et al.*, 2009c).

Secondly, non-academic behaviour could be observed among students as well as university staff at all levels (Teodorescu and Andrei, 2009), resulting in corruption with effects on the long run (Naghdipour and Emeagwali, 2013). This further leads to slow economic development and poor quality of public services (Andrei *et al.*, 2009d, Andrei *et al.*, 2009e)

Thirdly, Romanian universities are not very attractive to foreign students (Mirica *et al.*, 2015). One reason is that research in Romanian universities doesn't have enough visibility (see for example Teodorescu and Andrei, 2014 and Andrei *et al.*, 2016).

Encouraging students to participate in non-formal education can help solve these issues. Firstly, non-formal education is more flexible and student-centred, addressing specific educational needs of youths (Luxemburg Government, 2013). Therefore, for somebody who wants to develop a specific skill, pursuing a non-formal course is much more effective than enrolling in a university and attending an entire programme. However, this works only if non-formal education is properly recognised by a society.

Secondly, *"non-formal education is a way of helping societies to be more democratic and to respect human rights"* (Parliamentary Assembly Doc. 8595 of 15 December 1999). This idea emerged from the pioneers of educational reform: Nikolaaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig, who implemented the first non-formal based-learning school in Denmark in 1844 (Danish Adult Education Association, 2015) and Henry David Thoreau, who radically challenged formal education (See for example Thoreau, 1858)

Thirdly, non-formal education provided by student organisations helps increase communication among students (Mirica and Abdulamit, 2014). Moreover, with the creation of European student associations such as the European Students' Union, student networks created through student organisations can be extended internationally.

#### 5. Conclusions

Participation in non-formal education increased at European level in 2016 compared to 2011 and 2007. Moreover, non-formal education at European level is characterised by equal opportunities for men and women. With regard to age group, persons 55 to 64 are underrepresented in this kind of education. However, different situations could be observed at country level.

Romania has the lowest participation rate in non-formal education in Europe. Analysing the situation at regional level, one can conclude that the lowest participation rate is registered for the poorest regions. Also, taking into account the economic activity the lowest

participation rate can be observed for agriculture, forestry and fishing, despite the fact that approximately 20% of the employed population works in this area. Moreover, formal educational institutions provide only 5% of the services in this area.

Formal education in Romania, especially the higher education area, has several issues. However, non-formal education can provide several solutions to address them in the context of a proper institutional framework.

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